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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 004003

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL TU

SUBJECT: TURKEY: KURDISH YEZIDIS SPEAK UP

(U) Classified by Acting Political Counselor Nicholas S. Kass. Reason: 1.5(b)(d).

¶1. (U) Among Turkey's estimated 12-15 million Kurds exists a minority within a minority -- the Yezidis. According to Veysi Bulut, a leader of the Yezidi community in Turkey:

-- Yezidism (note: a non-Islamic religion derived from Zoroastrianism. End note) was once the dominant form of worship among the Kurds. Yezidis vigorously dispute the slander, widespread among certain Islamic elements, that they are "devil worshippers." As monotheists, the Yezidis "were the first to believe in one God;"

-- All Yezidis speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish that predominates among Kurds in Turkey. Indeed, "all Yezidis are Kurds, and all Kurds originally were Yezidis." Many were (he charged) forcibly converted to Islam or killed in religious intercommunal fighting with Muslims down through the centuries. There is still considerable animosity between Muslims and Yezidis in Turkey;

-- On the other hand, Yezidis "get along well" with Turkey's heterodox (Shia) Alevis -- especially with Kurdish Alevis, with whom the Yezidi share rituals including praying at sunrise and sunset. Yezidis "also see Christians as brothers;"

-- Politically, Yezidis support the secular State, and oppose Islamic extremism;

-- There are 200 Yezidi villages in Kurdish southeastern Turkey, with a population of about five thousand. There are over 800 thousand Yezidis across the border in Iraq, home to the most important Yezidi religious sites. (Note: these population figures were confirmed to us by Suavi Aydin, Professor of Archaeology at Hacettepe University and an expert on minorities in Turkey. End note.) Some 100 thousand Yezidis live in Iran, 800 thousand in Georgia, and 30 thousand in Syria;

-- During the Turkish State's recent struggle with the PKK (a.k.a. KADEK), many Yezidis fled to Germany, Sweden, Canada, and even the U.S. However, some expat Yezidis want to take advantage of the improved situation in southeastern Turkey to return to their homes.

Comment: Kurdish Microethnicity

¶2. (C) For historical reasons, Yezidis have long sought to deflect attention from themselves. But, like other elements of what is generally regarded as the wider Kurdish minority in Turkey -- including not only Kurdish Alevis but the more obscure ethnic Zaza subgroup -- we expect Yezidis to become more visible as the EU political reform program takes root.
PEARSON